

# The Challenges of Family Life

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**W**e might tend to think that the beginning points of family life are the most challenging: the first days of marriage and adjusting to sharing one's life with another; the anxiety of a newborn and the realization that one has zero experience in parenting skills. A companion idea may be that once we negotiate the rough waters of the harbor, smooth sailing lies ahead.

Actually what lies ahead is deeper water, sharks and the occasional hurricane.

As a younger parent, I couldn't quite imagine anything harder than lack of sleep, a crying baby, toxic diapers, complete dependence (the baby needs to be changed, fed, bathed, dressed, played with, read to, taught to speak, count, etc.) and traveling with a full array of paraphernalia (high chairs, play pens, toys, diapers, medicine, pacifiers, spit rags, food, clothes, etc.). I thought the people who said, "Enjoy these days, for they will pass quickly" had been brain damaged by parenthood.

But I have since learned that every phase of life has its difficulties, and Satan can use them all to put enormous stress on the family structure. As time goes on, the increasing rigors of life magnify our idiosyncrasies and character flaws. What might have been a minor annoyance earlier in a marriage can, under intense pressure, become a major crack in the foundation of the relationship.

As our children grow, they become more expensive (cars, insurance, social activities, tuition, weddings, etc.). Increased exposure to outside elements (school, friends, media) can undermine respect for parental authority. Gradual independence in decision making, combined with immature judgment, can test the wisdom and self-control of any parent.

And the added pressures of parenthood then begin to bear upon the marriage itself. Distractions with the children can become neglect toward the needs of one's spouse. Exhaustion kills spontaneous intimacy.

It isn't called "mid-life crisis" for nothing. Men begin to face the reality of physical decline and limited earning potential. Women grapple emotionally with the empty nest and psychologically with the ramifications of menopause. The calm waters and gentle breezes of later life are a figment of some poet's imagination. (Ok, have I thoroughly depressed the twenty-somethings?!)

Take heart, life is not all dark and dreary. But the point is that we must look ahead realistically and see the future for what it is. For if we are unprepared for its arrival, our idealistic bubble may explode and shake the foundations of our faith. So, how do we prepare for it? We must *truly believe that ...*

*"Godliness is profitable for all things" (1 Tim 4:8).*

*"Effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (Jas 5:16).*

Fervent love *"will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8).*

Husbands must love their wives *"as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph 5:25).*

Women must *"love their husbands [and] their children" (Tit 2:4).*

A house built on hearing and doing the words of Jesus will withstand the storms (Mt 7:24-27).

In short, we must constantly work to build our families on the character and principles that originate with God. This goes far beyond lip service. Rather, it is an abiding belief that true happiness is not some romantic feeling but *conforming to the will of God*. Magazine articles, self-help books, counseling and even sermons can help *only as they point us back to a deep and spiritual relationship with God*.

**And while it is vitally important to start early, it is never too late to get on the right track. There is great healing power in confession and repentance. Swallow your pride, admit your shortcomings and rededicate yourself to your family. God will help you.**